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UNCLAS BUCHAREST 001580

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/NCE - WILLIAM SILKWORTH

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ROMANIA MOVES AHEAD WITH PLANS TO ABOLISH DRAFT

REF: BUCHAREST 1563

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

1. (U) The GOR decided July 11 to abolish the draft for the Romanian Armed Forces effective January 1, 2007. The decision reflects Romania's ongoing defense modernization program, which includes the goal of an all-professional MOD, consisting of 75,000 soldiers and 15,000 civilians, by 2007. (Note: The MOD presently consists of about 100,000 civilian and military personnel. End Note.)

2. (SBU) A senior MOD official told PolOff July 14 that the GOR has submitted a bill to parliament abolishing the draft. The official added that there is broad bipartisan support for the abolition of mandatory military service, but stated that parliament would not approve the bill until this fall given that it is currently in summer recess. The likelihood of the PM's imminent resignation and early parliamentary elections also reduces the likelihood of swift action. (Ref)

3. (U) Other provisions of the government's decision and draft law include a requirement that male citizens must register at "military centers" once they have reached the age of 20. According to a July 12 GOR press communique, the draft's "suspension" will permit a voluntary military except in the case of "war, mobilization or siege." The draft will be phased out gradually, with the last batch of conscripts called up in October 2006 for a "reduced term" of service.

4. (SBU) Comment: The MOD official we spoke with confirmed that the Ministry of Interior will continue - for the time being - to use conscripts for certain positions, e.g. as guards. The 1700 Romanian troops currently deployed overseas, including the about 1400 in Afghanistan and Iraq, are all volunteers. Despite the clear advantages of an all-professional armed forces, especially given the GOR's commitment to developing NATO niche capabilities and supporting NATO operations, some Romanians we have spoken with have expressed nostalgia at the passing of the draft, which they describe as a sort of "rite of passage" for many young men. Many, however, bitterly remember the lugubrious political indoctrination and what one contact described as the "futility" of mandatory military service during the communist era. End Comment.

5. (U) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNET Website: www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest.

TAPLIN